

Blooms from a Wexner Collaboration Grant

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Imagine a world in which all Jewish professionals took time to enhance their own Jewish learning. A world in which Jewish learning didn't stop after formal graduate training, and where retirement was not the next opportunity for intensive Jewish study. Today Jewish professionals — no matter the level of their learning background — rarely take time for intensive Jewish study once they are in the field. The work is demanding and fills the hours. Opportunities for Jewish learning don't always present themselves, and are frequently pushed to the back burner.

But change is on the horizon. This summer, 70 Jewish professionals from 50 organizations opted to buck this trend, by joining [Mechon Hadar's Beit Midrash](#) ('House of Study') for four days of intensive learning and professional development at Hadar's annual [Jewish Professionals Institute](#).

The week-long program grew out of a Wexner Collaboration Grant in 2014 between Elie Kaunfer (WGF Alum, Class 15) and Allison Cook (WGF Alum, Class 14) and Orit Kent (WGF Alum, Class 14). What started as a cohort of 13 professionals, has grown steadily over four years to the current 70-participant program. The institute now has three distinct career area tracks, with new tracks likely to be added in the coming year:

- **Day School Educators** train with Dr. Orit Kent and Allison Cook of Pedagogy of Partnership and Lisa Exler of [Beit Rabban Day School](#), author of Hadar's [Standards for Fluency in Jewish Text and Practice](#).
- **Hillel Professionals** explore how to take their learning back to campus with Dr. Laura Yares of [Hillel International](#). All Hillel professionals are invited, and Hillel International sponsors the learning for Campus Directors, who will supervise Hillel Ezra Fellows (a cohort of engagement professionals focused on enhancing their roles as Jewish learners and educators.)
- **All Jewish Professionals** are invited to a general track focused on practical leadership and finding your Jewish self in your organization. This year's cohort dove into the theme of Social Justice, learning from leaders in the field: [Repair the World](#), Joe Gindi of [AJWS](#), Sarra Alpert of [Avodah](#), Yavilah McCoy of [Dimensions](#) and Andrew Belinfante who works as a [Keshet](#) field trainer in addition to serving as Director of Public Programs at Hadar.

All of the participants spend the morning studying Talmud, in three-leveled classes. For some, this is a first chance to experience *havruta* (one-to-one) learning and to delve into the primary text of the Talmud. For all, the mornings offer a chance to meet and learn with professionals from different fields, breaking down the silos and adding nuance to an understanding of what it means to be a "Jewish Professional." The four mornings give time to work through a section of Talmud and understand its meaning at a deep level through conversation and contemplation.

This year's Social Justice theme was explored through questions about fraud, the importance of language and the story of the Oven of Aknai. Ayelet Lipton, who teaches 4th grade at JCDS in Boston, shared: "Coming together with Jewish professionals of different backgrounds has been really powerful. The choice of social justice as the theme was so timely, providing the juiciness of what we really need to make our communities stronger and bring change to this world."

Many of the alumni of this institute will continue their learning back at home through [Project Zug](#), an online learning platform that replicates the experience of a full *beit midrash* by facilitating the same mode of *havruta* (one-to-one) learning, using video chat and a broad course library. Hadar's [Jewish Professionals Institute](#) is one step towards a vision of a Jewish Professional landscape where opportunities to learn are common, accessible and leave each person thirsty for more.



Rabbi Avi Killip, an Alum of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship (Class 22,) serves as VP of Strategy and Programs and Director of Project Zug at Mechon Hadar. Avi was ordained from Hebrew College's pluralistic Rabbinical School in Boston. She is a Wexner Graduate Fellow and holds a Bachelors and Masters from Brandeis University in Jewish Studies and Women & Gender Studies. She is also the host of the podcast Responsa Radio.